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INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY 0567
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 0353
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0623
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2735
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0655

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 PARIS 000858

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/30/2018
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GG, MK, JA, FR
SUBJECT: USD/P EDELMAN,S APRIL 28 MEETINGS WITH ELYSEE AND
DEFENSE MINISTRY

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reasons 1.4 b and d.

11. (C) Summary. On April 28, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Eric Edelman met with Francois Richier, Elysee Counselor for Strategic Affairs, and Michel Miraillet, Director of Strategic Affairs at the Ministry of Defense. Richier and Miraillet said France is satisfied with the outcomes of the Bucharest NATO summit, and U/S Edelman delivered to Miraillet Secretary Gates' letter on Bucharest and Afghanistan to Defense Minister Morin. Richier and Miraillet discussed possible deliverables for France, European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) focus during its upcoming EU Presidency. They also provided updates on the French defense budget and upcoming White Paper. Richier and Miraillet also proposed new maritime cooperation regarding piracy and Southeast Asian stability, and shared the latest French thinking regarding Iran, regional proliferation, and Lebanon/Syria. End summary.

BUCHAREST'S POSITIVE OUTCOMES

12. (C) Richier expressed his satisfaction with the Bucharest summit, noting that as President Sarkozy's first NATO summit, positive outcomes were very important for France. He said France had difficulty preparing for the summit in part due to the "mess" created by mixed French messages on the level of its reinforcement in Afghanistan leading up to the summit. He said that post-Bucharest polls in France show increased public support (57 percent) for reintegration into the NATO command structures. Miraillet said Bucharest was the best summit in a long time both in terms of substance and tone.

13. (C) Afghanistan: Edelman delivered to Miraillet a letter from Secretary Gates to French DefMin Morin requesting deployment of French Special Forces in Afghanistan. In response, Miraillet noted that such a decision would be made at the Elysee, though he noted that the MOD has performed the relevant contingency planning. Miraillet noted that deployment of the scheduled French reinforcements is on schedule. He questioned whether the April 27 terrorist attack in Kabul indicated that Afghan security forces are not yet capable of assuring the security of even Kabul and called the incident "a wake-up call." Edelman said that it was too early to tell, but there were some similarities to Al Quaida in Iraq. Regarding new French Ambassador to Afghanistan Jean

de Ponton d,Amecourt, who was Miraillet,s predecessor at the MOD, Miraillet said he might not take office till mid-summer. Responding to Edelman,s statement that more police mentors are needed in Afghanistan, Miraillet noted that the French gendarmerie is becoming more civilian in character over time and that the French government incurs political difficulty when seeking to send them on long, difficult overseas deployments. He noted that other European gendarme corps have similar challenges. Richier acknowledged that public opinion lags on Afghanistan, with poll results somewhat incoherent since the French public agrees that the return of the Taliban is unacceptable and that terrorism poses a threat, but support for reinforcement remains very low. He said he hopes the June 12 Afghan Support Conference will be a useful opportunity for France to reframe the issue and raise awareness of successes thus far. He said that momentum is in the right direction but needs to be increased.

¶4. (C) Missile defense: Richier said he was very happy with the Bucharest statement, both the substance and the prevailing sense of cooperation. Edelman reiterated U.S. interest in bilateral cooperation on a missile test bed as originally proposed by the French. Richier said, however, that a French decision on whether to pursue the cooperation (in a period of increased political sensitivity) will take time, as President Sarkozy, who has not yet been briefed in detail, will need to approve it. Edelman emphasized that this cooperative proposal must be seen in the broader strategic context.

¶5. (C) Georgia and Ukraine: Richier said the outcome was extraordinary, as it presupposes membership more so than would MAP itself. Miraillet said he was very surprised that

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the Allies agreed to the strong commitment to Georgia and Ukraine.

¶6. (C) Macedonian name dispute: Richier emphasized that France,s position of not pressuring Greece is based solely on Greece,s status as an ally. He said that France agrees that FYROM must be in NATO for the stabilization of the Balkans, but in this context, France,s position is not based on the substance of the question or any stake of France,s own. Richier noted that Sarkozy will travel to Greece in the next two months and will further discuss the question there.

ESDP, FRANCO-BRITISH DEFENSE COOPERATION

¶7. (C) Richier said that the recent Franco-British summit marked a milestone for ESDP, as the declaration covers a range of combined security issues for the first time. One key element is agreement on the need to focus on capabilities, and the ways and means to increase them without any increases in funds. Three specific projects were discussed: naval interoperability, the helicopter trust fund, and consortium support for the Airbus A400M transport aircraft. (Note: Richier referred to naval interoperability at the carrier vessel group level, which would permit France to retain some projection capability even if its own second aircraft carrier build is delayed, as expected.) When asked about the UK,s prospects for ratification of the EU Lisbon Treaty, Richier said that PM Brown should be able to obtain parliamentary approval but still has work to do. Miraillet said that President Bush,s remarks on ESDP at Bucharest were helpful but asked rhetorically whether the UK had truly heard them.

¶8. (C) Miraillet said that France,s goal for the ESDP focus of its EU Presidency will be to have agreed statements on capacities, and corresponding political commitments, by the end of 2008. Richier said the Franco-British initiatives could become EU deliverables and noted that France will try

to identify additional initiatives of this kind, which it would also share with the U.S. Richier said that France will keep the ESDP portion of its Presidency preparations low profile partly to avoid controversy before the referendum on Lisbon Treaty taking place in Ireland on June 12 and partly because France is aware that their efforts on ESDP could fail.

PIRACY IN HORN OF AFRICA; MARITIME COOPERATION

¶9. (C) Richier said that the French are reflecting internally on what France could do during its EU Presidency following recent incidents of piracy off the Horn of Africa. France,s possible ESDP focus on combined naval capabilities could help combat piracy as well as other key concerns like terrorism and trafficking. Edelman suggested to both interlocutors that they pursue ideas for such cooperation with Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and former CNO, during his upcoming (May 12-13) visit to Paris. Miraillet noted that cooperation with South Africa on piracy could be fruitful, as well as providing the U.S. a good public diplomacy opportunity in Africa (which he has previously said the U.S. needs, given public suspicions regarding Africom).

¶10. (C) Miraillet proposed a bilateral meeting between Secretaries Gates and Morin at the upcoming Shangri-La

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Dialogue meeting in Singapore. He said that France is uneasy with the rise of submarine fleets in Southeast Asia (while acknowledging that France contributed to that phenomenon with sales to Malaysia). All the countries pursuing fleets say they want regional stability, but mistrust prevails in the region and the Straits of Malacca are important to the world economy. He suggested, therefore, confidence building measures such as a seminar on how to improve submarine security, including elements of emergency rescue operations or actual exercises on submarine rescue operations. He asked whether the U.S. would be interested in jointly organizing such initiatives. Edelman suggested that Adm. Mullen and CNO Adm. Gary Roughead would be appropriate interlocutors.

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FRENCH DEFENSE POLICIES AND BUDGET

¶11. (C) France,s Nuclear Policy: Richier noted that Sarkozy,s March speech on France,s nuclear policy reinforced the principle of deterrence while returning to fewer specifics and thus more room to maneuver. As for the portion of Sarkozy,s speech on nuclear disarmament, Richier stated that public interest in the subject required Sarkozy to address it, which he did by reviewing France,s accomplishments and goals. Richier noted that portions of Sarkozy,s remarks targeted China. Richier said, and Edelman agreed, that the NATO strategic concept should include nuclear deterrence at its core. Richier commented that UK officials frame nuclear weapons very badly in public discourse by promoting a "nuclear-free world" while seeking to modernize their own programs.

¶12. (C) Defense White Paper and Budget: Miraillet said that the Defense White Paper is not expected now until the end of June, when it will be released in both French and English. He noted that in addition to the White Paper exercise, the MOD is also undergoing the same General Review of Public Policy (RGPP) as the rest of the government. This is "terrible" for the MOD, which is already a "lean" organization. He also noted that the upcoming base realignment and closures are very unpopular among municipalities and thus politically difficult for the

ministry. He stated that the essentially frozen defense budget (for the 2009-2013 period that will be covered by an upcoming military appropriations bill) means France runs the risk of slipping just under the 2% of GDP level of military spending that President Sarkozy has said he wishes for France to maintain.

¶13. (C) Miraillet said that the White Paper will address 12 hypothetical engagement scenarios ranging from conventional war to cyberwarfare and humanitarian missions. He noted that the paper will include some elements of fiscal guidance, reflecting decisions made by the President in recent weeks. The first draft is still under preparation and will not be reviewed internally until mid-May, but Miraillet said that consensus has emerged that France must abandon its historical goal of being able to project a force of 50,000 troops overseas. Miraillet said the White Paper exercise has also already concluded France needs to do more on monitoring from space and that France's second aircraft carrier will not be canceled, although it may be delayed or financed through alternative means.

NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST ISSUES

¶14. (C) Iran and non-proliferation: Richier said that France would like for the EU to do more on stopping Iran's nuclear ambitions, as international efforts thus far have not succeeded. He said Iran's neighbors will eventually be tempted to acquire their own capabilities, and the question is when. If the point will come once Iran has attained weapons capability, other countries may seek the faster route of purchasing (rather than developing) capabilities. If instead the point is when Iran hits a certain point in developing its capability, regional proliferation will likely occur sooner, especially since Iranian President Ahmadi Nejad is very vocal about milestones such as the number of operating centrifuges. Richier stressed that France and the U.S. should anticipate now what the Iran situation will look like in summer 2009, after U.S. and Iranian elections, given that the Iranian regime will not change its course before then and Iran will thus have made much progress.

¶15. (C) Lebanon/Syria: Edelman noted that he will travel to Lebanon in June in an effort to move the U.S. relationship with the Lebanese armed forces onto a more structured footing. He said he may stop again in Paris en route to or from Lebanon (possibly June 4 or 5). Richier and Edelman discussed the 2007 Israeli strike on a Syrian nuclear facility. Richier noted that today's situation with Syria may parallel 2003, when Iran documented to France that no uranium conversion activity was taking place in Iran. Though the statement was likely true at that moment, Iran's

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subsequent activity rendered it almost immediately void. Miraillet agreed with Edelman that some European countries are not reacting strongly enough to the discovery in Syria and that even the UK has had a surprisingly low-key reaction. Miraillet said that France could make a demarche to IAEA Director General ElBaradei to reinforce the point that Syria's purported program is important to not just the U.S. and that gauging sentiment in Geneva was also important. In a sidebar comment, Miraillet noted that France is pursuing an intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan but that progress is slow due in part to Japan's lack of an information protection culture.

¶16. (U) USD/P Edelman has cleared this message.

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